

UNITED STATES NAVAL ACADEMY

SAILORS AS DIPLOMATS:  
THE UNITED STATES NAVY IN BAHRAIN, 1971-1977

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Since World War II the United States Navy has dominated the seas from one side of the globe to the other. It has been an invaluable policy tool to exert political will and force when necessary. Ships cannot go to sea, however, without a support network. Nowhere has reliable support been more crucial than in the Persian Gulf. Today, the destination of most deployments by Navy ships is the Persian Gulf. The U.S. has few staunch allies in this volatile region of the world. One country, however, has remained an important part of American foreign policy and power projection there for almost 30 years. Bahrain, located northwest of the Qatar peninsula and only a few miles by causeway from Saudi Arabia, is the host of the Navy's Fifth Fleet. Although only a few ships are permanently assigned to the Fifth Fleet, many ships come under its operational control while on deployment in the region. The small naval facility at Bahrain provides ships with a safe haven from the dangers of the Gulf, a place to make needed repairs, and a tolerable liberty port for the crews. This facility, which the Bahrainis view as a stabilizing force for both their defense and economy, has been in American control since the stationing agreement of 1971.

The American presence, however, has not always been well received in the region. Controversy surrounded this presence from the beginning, but it came to a head during the 1973 Arab-Israeli War.<sup>1</sup> If not for the trust that had been established between the Bahraini leaders and the commanders of the U.S. Middle East Force, the agreement would have died before it even started. Fortunately, some American leaders were able to grasp the tricky political situation that the Bahrainis faced. In particular, Rear Admiral Robert J. Hanks and Rear Admiral William J. Crowe were sensitive to the delicate paradoxes of the Bahraini situation. They understood that

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<sup>1</sup> Coming on the heels of Bahrain's independence, the stationing agreement of 1971 was criticized by some Bahrainis as a threat to Bahraini sovereignty.

the Bahraini leadership wanted an American presence to bolster Bahrain's security and economy, but they also realized that American policy towards Israel made it politically difficult for the Bahrainis to publicly accept such a presence. By understanding the essence of the situation—that the Bahrainis could not be perceived by their fellow Arabs as hosts of an American presence in light of America's support of Israel—Hanks and Crowe were able to negotiate in a manner that kept the Middle East Force in Bahrain and solidified an American presence there for many years to come.

Bahrain's strategic location and valuable pearling industry had made it an important stop on any trade route for centuries. The islands had also been relatively isolated from Wahhabi influence on the Arabian Peninsula because of the water barrier provided by the Gulf of Bahrain. This shelter from religious conservatism made the islands more accepting of a foreign presence. This presence expanded enormously with the rise of the British Empire. In 1769 the first Royal Navy ships arrived in the Gulf. They were to protect British mercantile interests in the Gulf that were becoming threatened by the increased piracy of Gulf Arabs.<sup>2</sup> While the Navy resisted deployment to the Gulf, more and more politicians were beginning to argue that the British government must seek greater involvement in the politics of the Gulf if the British were to effectively dominate the region's economy.<sup>3</sup> By the late nineteenth century, Britain had become the primary foreign power in the Persian Gulf. The British had such an influence that the Gulf became known as an "English lake." Due to its strategic location and relative openness to Western influence, the British centered many of their Gulf operations at Bahrain.

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<sup>2</sup> J.B. Kelly, *Britain and the Persian Gulf* (London: Oxford UP, 1968), 57.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 53-4.

The British, however, did not view the economic development of the Gulf as a top priority. They simply sought to prevent others from doing so. Their main concern was to protect India, the jewel of their empire.<sup>4</sup> An important aspect of the British presence in the Persian Gulf was the Residency system.<sup>5</sup> The Political Resident of the Persian Gulf, who lived in Bushire, Iran but took orders from Bombay, was responsible for the implementation of policy in the Gulf.<sup>6</sup> Central to this policy was a stable Persian Gulf that would not threaten India. By the 20<sup>th</sup> Century many of the local Residents had begun to exercise significant influence over the internal affairs of the Gulf States.<sup>7</sup> This heightening influence would soon encounter Bahraini protest. Such discontent, coupled with the dismemberment of the British Empire after World War II and a strained economy, persuaded the British to withdraw from Bahrain in the late 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>8</sup>

While the increased influence of the Residents had hurt the Bahraini perception of the British, the memory of it would come to serve the Americans well. Viewed as partners, rather than colonialists, the Americans would constantly benefit from favorable comparisons with the departed British. After years of limited contact with the Persian Gulf, the United States began to show an increased interest in the region in the early 1920s, as oil became an increasingly important resource. When oil was discovered in Bahrain in 1932, the Americans stood to profit a great deal. Since their investments in Iranian oil were prospering, both the British government

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 500.

<sup>5</sup> Rosemarie Said Zahlan, *The Making of the Modern Gulf States: Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, The United Arab Emirates, and Oman* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 49.

<sup>6</sup> Fred H. Lawson, *Bahrain: The Modernization of Autocracy* (Boulder: Westview, 1989), 34.

<sup>7</sup> Mahdi Abdalla Al-Tajir, *Bahrain, 1920-1945: Britain, the Shaikh, and the Administration* (London: Croom Helm, 1987), 3 and Zahlan, 49.

<sup>8</sup> J.B. Kelly, *Arabia, the Gulf, and the West* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), 48.

and British oil companies paid little attention to Bahrain's oil.<sup>9</sup> Having gained the oil concession from Bahrain, Standard Oil's subsidiary, the Bahrain Petroleum Company Limited (BAPCO), began to make considerable profits in the oil fields of Bahrain. Although it was technically based in Ottawa, BAPCO was an American company that stood to make money for Americans.<sup>10</sup> This crucial economic influence hedged British authority and power in the region by putting an out-of-Empire presence at the strategic center of British operations in the Persian Gulf.<sup>11</sup> The American government did not, however, pursue an active role in the region. Instead it adopted a *laissez faire* philosophy that sought only to promote an Open Door policy for oil exploitation in the Persian Gulf.<sup>12</sup>

World War II, however, demonstrated the increasing importance to the United States of developing oil fields in the region. Because of cheaper prices, the proximity to operating areas, and a desire to retain domestic stores in case of emergency, the U.S. Navy began to fuel many of its ships with oil from the Gulf in the late 1940s. In fact, the military fought the Korean War relying solely on Persian Gulf oil.<sup>13</sup> Although its national interests were increasing in the region, the American government still remained reluctant to commit militarily to the region.<sup>14</sup> Many believed that the military defense of the Gulf was still the responsibility of the British. As the British were slow in recovering from World War II and the Soviet presence became more

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<sup>9</sup> Angela Clarke, *Bahrain Oil and Development, 1929-1989* (Boulder: International Research Center for Energy and Economic Development, 1990), 52.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 60, 88.

<sup>11</sup> Michael A. Palmer, *On Course to Desert Storm: The United States Navy and the Persian Gulf* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Naval Historical Center, 1992), 10.

<sup>12</sup> Clarke, 59.

<sup>13</sup> Michael A. Palmer, *Guardians of the Gulf: A History of America's Expanding Role in the Persian Gulf, 1833-1992* (New York: The Free Press, 1992), 45.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

ominous north of Iran, political leaders in the United States began to believe that the U.S. could no longer shy away from a military presence in the Gulf.<sup>15</sup>

In 1949 the United States Navy officially formed the Middle East Force.<sup>16</sup> Although American efforts in the Persian Gulf would be challenged by general Arab anger over U.S. policies in Lebanon and Israel, as well as CIA intervention in Iran's internal affairs, the Gulf Arabs received the Middle East Force on its many port visits with relative friendliness. When the British military finally left Bahrain in the summer of 1971, the United States had established enough of a naval presence in the Persian Gulf to both necessitate and demand an agreement to retain partial use of the former Royal Navy facility at Jufair.

Rear Admiral Marmaduke Bayne had arrived in Bahrain in the spring of 1970 as the commander of the Middle East Force (CMEF). Since the British had always been the primary guards of Bahrain's safety and security, especially against the ever-present Iranian sovereignty claims over the island, a cloud of fear and uncertainty rested over the island in regards to the future of Bahraini security. Additionally, there was much discussion in the American government about how much the Americans should adjust their presence in order to capitalize on the upcoming British departure.<sup>17</sup> The eventual answer to this question was that not much should change. Instead, the American government decided to continue to rely on the Twin Pillars Policy of the Nixon Doctrine. This policy gave assistance and weapons to Saudi Arabia and Iran so that these American allies could lead the way in the security of the Persian Gulf.<sup>18</sup> In this

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<sup>15</sup> Harry S Truman, *Memoirs, Volume 1: Year of Decisions* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1955), 552.

<sup>16</sup> Palmer, *Guardians of the Gulf*, 46-7.

<sup>17</sup> CDR David Winkler, *Amir, Admirals, and Desert Sailors* (Manuscript for the Naval Historical Center, n.d.), 73.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

context, the MEF served primarily as a small "show the flag" force of a flagship and several destroyers.<sup>19</sup>

In early 1971 negotiations had begun, however, to ensure that the MEF could retain access to the old British facilities. From the start of these negotiations, inter-Arab politics would play an important role in determining how visible the American presence in Bahrain could be. Even though the leaders of many neighboring countries disapproved, the Emir clearly desired a continued U.S. presence.<sup>20</sup> The negotiations continued through the excitement of Bahraini independence on 14 August 1971. Eventually, Bayne was able to secure a significant portion of the former British base at Jufair. The new American facility would include the Force's shore headquarters, a communications facility with antenna farm, two small club buildings, a tiny restaurant, three sets of debilitated officers' quarters, a barracks buildings, and a small amount of open space. The MEF would also get priority use of the valuable Berth No. 1 at Mine Sulman Pier.<sup>21</sup> Although Bayne was not able to increase the size of the MEF as he had wished to do, he had been able to convince a newly independent Bahrain to continue to support an American presence there.

In late 1972, Bayne left the Middle East Force in the capable hands of Rear Admiral Robert J. Hanks. Hanks would soon face numerous challenges that would not only affect the Middle East Force's presence in Bahrain but also its very right to stay on the island. Upon his arrival, he quickly began to realize that American foreign policy would perhaps make his efforts to permanently establish an American naval presence in the Persian Gulf that would be able to coexist with an independent Bahrain difficult because American politicians solely focused on

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<sup>19</sup> ADM Elmo R. Zumwalt, Jr., *On Watch: A Memoir* (New York: Quadrangle, 1976), 454.

<sup>20</sup> Winkler, 79.

<sup>21</sup> RADM Robert J. Hanks, *Memoirs as CMEF*, n.d., 316.

containing the Soviets, not the importance of Bahrain to U.S. energy supplies. Hanks argues that America's firm belief in the independence of U.S. energy supplies from Middle Eastern politics drove U.S. policy to focus on the Middle East only as another arena with which to tip the superpower balance away from the Soviets. With this objective in hand, American policy ignored other "festering problems" in the Middle East, such as the Arab perception of U.S. policy toward Israel, that would soon thrust themselves into the forefront of America's concerns.<sup>22</sup>

Events later in Hanks's tour as CMEF would change America's attitude, but American policies did constrain him from the beginning of his time in Bahrain. No amount of persuasion or argument could convince Washington that an American presence was necessary in the Persian Gulf for something other than balancing the Soviet naval presence there. Since the American government did not yet appreciate the importance of the Gulf's oil reserves, it continued to adhere to the Twin Pillar Policy to replace the British military presence in the Gulf.<sup>23</sup> While the United States turned to its allies the Shah of Iran and the King of Saudi Arabia, the Soviet Union persisted to increase its influence in the Persian Gulf. Within two months of the British announcement to pull back from the Persian Gulf, the Soviet Union sent a naval squadron on an extended deployment throughout the Indian Ocean. The Soviets were clearly expanding their military power in the Gulf through the use of their navy.<sup>24</sup> The Soviet Navy's combat power in the Gulf would thus continue to dwarf that of the fledgling Middle East Force.<sup>25</sup> This fact was

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, i.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, i and 91.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 89-90.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.



not lost on the U.S. Navy. It recognized that the Soviet Navy held a 10 to 1 numerical advantage in the region.<sup>26</sup>

However, more important than the issues of superpower balance and confrontation in the Middle East, the decaying Arab-Israeli situation and the presence of internationally valuable oil reserves there soon would dominate the politics of the region.<sup>27</sup> From the moment the Bahrainis agreed to serve as hosts to an American naval presence, they faced harsh criticism from radical Arab groups and some other Arab countries since the U.S. was viewed as another colonial power and a supporter of Israel.<sup>28</sup> In response the Government of Bahrain consistently asserted that there was no formal treaty between the United States and Bahrain. Instead, there was a low-key stationing agreement in place that allowed the United States to use a portion of the former British naval facility at Jufair.<sup>29</sup> Hanks's ability to understand the complexities of inter-Arab politics would prove to be crucial throughout his tour as CMEF. It quickly became apparent to Hanks that the Middle East Force's mission was as much political as military. One of the Force's designated responsibilities was to visit ports in its area of responsibility and "carry out the overall assigned peacetime task of generating good will and prestige associated with showing the flag."<sup>30</sup> Hanks also had to be sensitive to how recently Bahrain had gained its independence. Memories of British colonialism and coercion were indeed fresh in many Bahrainis' minds. Hanks grasped this important dynamic early in this tour and commented, "The U.S. presence, however, had to

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<sup>26</sup> Middle East Force Command History, 1973 (Operational Archives, Naval Historical Center), Section II, Part A, 1e, page II-A-III.

<sup>27</sup> Hanks, 19.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>30</sup> CINCUSNAVEUR Instruction C5440.5A, 23 January 1973, Subj: Mission Directive for Middle East Force, Enclosed in Middle East Force Command History, 1973 (Operational Archives, Naval Historical Center).

be low key, unobtrusively evincing firm but friendly American interest in the region without resorting to the bulldozer approach epitomized by old fashioned gunboat diplomacy."<sup>31</sup> Hanks was able to make significant progress in combating the colonial perceptions that the British left behind by embracing and respecting Arab political customs as he acted as a representative of the United States.

Crucial to Hanks's successful navigation of the Persian Gulf's political minefield was his recognition that Arabs were highly intelligent and friendly people, not unsophisticated shepherders as many Westerners had come to believe. Upon meeting the Emir of Bahrain, Shaikh Isa, Hanks marveled, "One could escape neither the genuine warmth of his friendship nor the glow of his personality as he led us into a small reception chamber."<sup>32</sup> Not only did the Americans in Bahrain gravitate toward the Bahrainis, but the Bahrainis also enjoyed dealing with the Americans. Relations with Americans were not without their problems, however, for the Bahrainis. Bahraini businessman Yousuf Almoayyed explained the Bahrainis' dilemma to Hanks, "'We prefer to deal with Americans. You are honest and friendly. You don't have a 'colonial master' attitude. And, you also have the technology we badly need to develop our countries. *But, your Government's policy toward Israel makes it so difficult for us* (italics in original).'"<sup>33</sup> Throughout the negotiations and discussions between the Navy and the leaders of Bahrain, the Bahrainis were almost always extremely friendly and open behind closed doors. Their public posture, however, could not reveal their personally warm feelings towards the Americans. To display publicly such a position would be political suicide. In an address to U.S. Naval War College Students on 5 May 1973, Yousuf Shirawi, the highly influential Bahraini

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<sup>31</sup> Hanks, 29.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 14

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 49-50.

Minister of Development and Engineering Services, would note, "While Bahrain was a small and relatively poor nation, it nevertheless was Arab; albeit a relatively diminutive car in a long Arab train and, where that train went, so would Bahrain go."<sup>34</sup> This reality would soon threaten the Middle East Force's very right to reside in Bahrain.

Having quickly become acquainted with both the Bahraini leaders and, just as importantly, the complex nature of the American presence in Bahrain, Hanks immediately began to see this dynamic take center stage in both his everyday business and American foreign policy in the Persian Gulf. In March Palestinian guerrillas and Israeli commandoes squared off as tensions began to rise in the volatile Arab-Israeli conflict. For Americans in the Middle East, such confrontations always led to accusations and criticisms regarding U.S. collusion in Israel's actions. March 1973 was certainly no exception.<sup>35</sup> When the news of the confrontation reached Bahrain, public outcry against both Israel and its alleged American partner heightened to such a level that the Bahraini government felt compelled to increase security outside Hanks's residence. This measure was, however, done quietly and not made public.<sup>36</sup> Emotions soon cooled, and the March escalation of tensions passed without incident. For the first time, however, Hanks saw tangible proof that what happened on the other side of the Middle East significantly affected the Middle East Force in Bahrain.

Ever since the near fatal Case Act of 1972, the Bahraini leadership had been very reluctant to give any publicity to the presence of Middle East personnel.<sup>37</sup> Passed in reaction to the president's growing dominance of foreign affairs, the Case Act required the president to

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

report all executive agreements with foreign governments to Congress.<sup>38</sup> The Bahrainis, since Bahrain had been the subject of much of the debate in Congress over the Case Act, feared that this requirement would bring added publicity to the American presence there. When General Andrew Goodpaster, the commander of all American forces in Europe and the Middle East, proposed a one-day visit to Bahrain, the Bahrainis reacted with typical complexity. They responded that the visit was acceptable so long as there was no association with the Government of Bahrain and no publicity surrounding the event that might attract the media. The Bahrainis also requested that Goodpaster wear civilian clothes while in Bahrain. Hanks cuts to the essence of the Bahraini reaction by commenting, "Translated into blunt, everyday language, Bahrain would be delighted if the general did *not* come but, if he insisted, he should slip quietly onto the island, departing as surreptitiously and quickly as possible."<sup>39</sup> Goodpaster and Hanks complied with the Bahrainis' conditions, and Goodpaster spent 26 April 1973 in Bahrain. The visit went well, and Goodpaster left Bahrain being held in high esteem by its leaders.<sup>40</sup> Goodpaster's visit is yet another example of the double-sided relationship between the United States and Bahrain. Clearly, the Bahrainis respected him and would have been eager to work more with him. Goodpaster, however, was still an American and still represented the government that consistently supported Israel in all of its endeavors. As both the Bahraini leadership and Hanks came to grips with the nature of their dichotomous relationship, the storm clouds that would bring the October 1973 war made it clear that the greatest test of their relationship was yet to come.

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<sup>38</sup> Sidney M. Milkis and Michael Nelson, *The American Presidency: Origins and Development, 1776-1998* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, 1999), 326.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 132-3.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

On 6 October the clouds unleashed their long bottled-up rain as Egypt and Syria struck Israeli forces in the Sinai Peninsula and Golan Heights. Hanks's worst nightmare had become a reality. His first concern was for American citizens who could be affected by the spreading fighting.<sup>41</sup> If evacuation became a necessity, the Middle East Force would face considerable difficulties in dealing with this mission since the *USS Lasalle*, which, as the MEF flagship, was ideally equipped for such an undertaking, was undergoing maintenance in Singapore.<sup>42</sup> Adding to Hanks's dilemma surrounding evacuation procedures was the unpredictability of the Arab reaction. He anxiously stated, "Past precedent offered ambiguous clues as to what we might expect in Bahrain."<sup>43</sup> Comforting was the fact that, in the twenty-five year history of the Middle East Force, there had never been a severely adverse local reaction to the Navy's presence.<sup>44</sup> This is not to say, however, that the Americans of the Middle East had no cause for concern. After all, a relatively small escalation of tensions in March had led the Bahraini government to increase security outside Hanks's quarters. Although that situation passed without incident, skirmishes between small guerrilla units held no comparison to Arab armies storming into Israeli-occupied territory. Hanks, not knowing the extent to which the Bahrainis would react to the escalation of the conflict, had no choice but to "sit tight" and advise the Middle East Force personnel, "to walk softly, keep their eyes open for signs of anti-American activity, and stay well clear of any large public gatherings."<sup>45</sup>

Even though the safety of Americans throughout the Middle East was of the utmost concern to Hanks, he also immediately recognized the political implications of the growing war

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 181-2.

<sup>42</sup> Winkler, Chapter 5, 4.

<sup>43</sup> Hanks, 183.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

between the Arab states and Israel. In the months leading to the war, he had come to the conclusion that such a war could prove to be fatal for the Middle East Force. Since almost any action by Israel would be supported by the United States, a war could significantly reduce American influence amongst the Arab nations of the Middle East. This line of thinking continued to conclude that war would bring an increase in Soviet influence to replace the lost American influence.<sup>46</sup> As word from the Sinai and the Golan Heights reached Bahrain, Hanks began to realize that the situation could become worse than previously expected. In previous engagements, particularly the Six-Day War of 1967, Israel had easily crushed the Arab armies. This time, however, the Arabs were able to surprise the Israelis and initially were seeing much success on the battlefield. The sight of a weakened Israel quickly brought talk of possible American military intervention. If U.S. forces did indeed intervene, Soviet intervention on behalf of the Arabs was likely. Obviously, such a superpower confrontation was something that should be avoided at all costs. If the Israelis were able to repulse the Arabs, the perception in the Arab world would surely be that they could not have done so without American help. The truth of this assertion did not matter; perception was the key. Hanks concluded, "Given U.S. national interests throughout the Middle East, Americans would probably emerge as the biggest losers of all, no matter how the conflict ended."<sup>47</sup>

The opportunity to gain influence in the Middle East was not lost on the Soviets. They knew that increased influence in the Middle East would mean freer access to valuable Persian Gulf ports. Such access would make their frequent naval deployments to the region much easier to execute. As the fighting continued, Moscow broadcast reports on the Soviet government's

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 184-5.

position on the situation to the Arab world in Arabic. One such broadcast explicitly blamed Israel for the hostilities and implicitly indicted the United States for being an accomplice to Israel's actions:

They [the Israelis] have caused the present renewal of military operations in the Middle East, causing human loss, calamities and destruction. According to news agency reports, Tel Aviv and the well-known Western circles protecting it are trying to avoid responsibility. But the Soviet Government's statement deals a severe blow to all such attempts.

The mention of "well-known Western circles" is clearly a reference to the United States' alleged assistance to Israel. The radio broadcast continued in the same vein of explanation by reporting, "The statement says that responsibility for the present events in the Middle East and their consequences falls totally on Israel and on those external reactionary circles which continually protect Israel in its expansionist ambitions."<sup>48</sup> Again, the United States is the target in the Soviets' reference to "external reactionary circles." By broadcasting to the Arab world obvious references to American involvement in the brewing conflict, the Soviets were attempting to drive the wedge between the Arab world and the United States even deeper than it already had been driven by previous American support of Israel.

In the first few days of the war, signs from the Bahraini government, however, were actually favorable. Although they had closed the airport to non-Arab military traffic, the MEF flag aircraft and the cargo flights bringing priority cargo to the MEF were still allowed to operate.<sup>49</sup> As the fighting raged on, it became increasingly clear that the Israelis would not roll to an easy victory over the Arabs. Faced with reports of Soviet mobilization and the possibility of losing its only close ally in the region, the Nixon administration ordered a massive military re-

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<sup>48</sup> "Soviet Government Statement Discussed for Arab Listeners", Moscow in Arabic to the Arab World, 1600 GMT 8 October 1973, FBIS Daily Reports, 10 October 1973, page III.F-1.

<sup>49</sup> Hanks, 194.

supply effort to Israel on 13 October. Meanwhile the Bahraini foreign minister had warned Hanks that an American re-supply effort could force the Bahrainis to cancel the stationing agreement. He also warned that the United States could not continue its traditional policies towards the Arab-Israeli situation if it hoped to remain in Bahrain.<sup>50</sup> To make matters worse, President Nixon compared the current policy toward the situation in the Middle East to the one regarding Lebanon in 1958. In Lebanon, U.S. Marines had gone ashore.<sup>51</sup> This comparison, along with the promised re-supply effort, sharply increased Arab criticism of U.S. policy and possible intervention.

The reaction to Nixon's announcement in the Arab world was tremendous. Arab radio immediately began to broadcast intensifying statements regarding American support of Israel. Also included were pleas to the American people to understand the Arabs' viewpoint and pressure the American leadership to stop its one-sided support of Israel. Most drastic were messages that threatened, "Welcome, O Nixon and your soldiers, to your graveyard in the Middle East" and "Let our Arab land be a burial ground for the United States, let our Arab land be a second Vietnam."<sup>52</sup> While these threats were surely not indicative of what every Arab believed, they do demonstrate the degree to which the United States had alienated the Arab world. Although Bahrain had remained relatively tolerant of American support of Israel, protests over the MEF did eventually begin there on 19 October. Hanks knew that the MEF's chances of staying in Bahrain were slim. The Bahraini leadership had to be able to publicly defend and

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 198-9.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 205.

<sup>52</sup> "Nixon Warned on Intervention," Voice of Palestine [Clandestine] in Arabic to the Arab World, 0824 GMT 18 October 1973, FBIS Daily Reports, 19 October 1973, page V.A-5 and "Urges Boycott of Oil," Algiers Voice of Palestine in Arabic, 1830 GMT 16 October 1973, FBIS Daily Reports, 18 October 1973, page V.A-2.



justify the American presence both within its borders and in the Arab world as a whole. To make matters worse for the MEF, Bahrain's participation in the Arab oil boycott was largely symbolic since Bahrain exported very little oil. Therefore, expelling the MEF would be a visible and substantial display of the Bahrainis' resolve to stand by their fellow Arabs.<sup>53</sup> In a conversation with BAPCO president Walt Stoltz, Hanks reasoned that hope remained if the Bahrainis would honor the one-year cancellation requirement of the stationing agreement and give the MEF one year to leave Bahrain. If given a year, Hanks hoped that the war might end sometime during that period and negotiations could begin to reverse the expected cancellation decision.<sup>54</sup>

That decision came later on 19 October when the Bahraini Foreign Minister informed Sam Starrett, the acting U.S. chargé d'affaires, that the Government of Bahrain could no longer tolerate the United States' position on the Arab-Israeli conflict and that it was invoking Article XIV of the stationing agreement. Although they had cancelled the agreement, the Bahrainis had also remained faithful to the cancellation clause. This patience, as previously discussed, gave Hanks hope that the door was not shut for good.<sup>55</sup> According to the Arab press releases surrounding the cancellation, however, such hope was nonexistent. On 20 October a Saudi News Agency reported that the Bahrain Council of Ministers had terminated the agreement due to the "hostile American attitude toward the Arab nation."<sup>56</sup> No mention was made that the Americans would have one year to complete their withdrawal. The next day an Egyptian News Service

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<sup>53</sup> Hanks, 217.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

<sup>56</sup> "Bahrain to Terminate 1971 Port Agreement with U.S.," Riyadh Domestic Service in Arabic, 2000 GMT 20 October 1973, FBIS Daily Reports, 21-22 October 1973.

announced that Bahrain had joined the Arab boycott against the United States.<sup>57</sup> Also on that day the *Gulf Mirror*'s front page headline read, "U.S. NAVY TOLD TO QUIT."<sup>58</sup> Clearly, the Bahrainis had achieved their goal; they had publicly separated themselves from the United States without leaving the Middle East Force out to dry.

On the evening of 21 October, Hanks and Starrett went to the Palace for an audience with the Emir. At first, as he explained how the Bahrainis could not tolerate America's aid to Israel, the Emir was uncharacteristically cold. When he mentioned Nixon's bill to Congress that would give Israel \$2 billion in military aid, he bitterly inquired, "'Why on earth, did your president do that?'" Throughout the audience the Emir had spoken in Arabic as the Foreign Minister translated. When Hanks finally responded by expressing gratitude for the friendliness shown to the MEF, the Emir's tone immediately changed. He began to speak in English and lamented about the regrettable situation that had led to the cancellation decision. This sentiment demonstrates the Emir's deeply held fondness for the Americans and his sincere reluctance about the decision he was politically forced to make.<sup>59</sup> Hanks's ability to compel the Emir to change his tone during this most uncomfortable exchange is probably the best example of Hanks's thorough understanding of the intricacies of Arab politics. By displaying personal gratitude toward the Bahrainis, Hanks further endeared the Emir to the Americans. Such actions were critical to giving the MEF hope of staying in Bahrain. This audience, along with conversations with Stoltz and British Ambassador Robert Tesh, confirmed Hanks's perception that a reversal

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<sup>57</sup> "Bahrain Included in List of Those Suspending Oil to U.S.," Cairo Domestic Service in Arabic, 1400 GMT 21 October 1973, FBIS Daily Reports, 23 October 1973, page V.B-8.

<sup>58</sup> Hanks, 222.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 225-6.

was indeed possible. He thus advised his chain of command that he would take no immediate action to begin withdrawing the MEF.<sup>60</sup>

By the end of October, a cease-fire was tenuously holding between the Israelis and Arabs. In Bahrain Hanks remained hopeful that the cancellation decision could be reversed. When he met with the Emir in November, the Emir inquired about the progress of the withdrawal, but he also showed concern for the Navy families in Bahrain. Hanks told him that he had not yet begun withdrawal procedures because he hoped that events would allow the relationship to change once again. He pointed out to the Emir that the presence of the MEF ensures that Bahrain is not threatened by outside infringement. Hanks could not push this point too emphatically, however, because several ranking members of the Bahraini leadership believed that the MEF was the greatest threat to Bahrain's sovereignty and independence.<sup>61</sup> Hanks realized that he had to give the Emir a way to protect himself politically if the MEF were to be kept in Bahrain. He explains, "If during the months ahead, there was insufficient movement to provide a political shield behind which Bahrain's government could safely reverse its decision, the eviction decree would stand."<sup>62</sup>

In January Andrew Kilgore arrived in Bahrain to fill the vacant post of chargé d' affaires. Starrett had been doing the job, but the absence of someone in the actual post was seen as disrespectful to the Bahrainis. This constant turnover of diplomats actually made the naval commanders a relatively stable presence and gave them the longevity necessary to have a greater impact than one would normally expect of a military officer in the political arena. The Bahrainis immediately warmed to Kilgore, however, because he had prior experience in Bahrain and spoke

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 228.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 257-9.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 263.

fluent Arabic.<sup>63</sup> Meanwhile, the Arab nations were beginning to discuss lifting the oil embargo against the United States. The Foreign Minister told Kilgore that if the embargo was indeed lifted that there would be a good chance the October decision could be reversed.<sup>64</sup> As the first months of 1974 became history, it was still unclear as to whether or not AOPEC would lift the embargo. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's "shuttle diplomacy" was a positive step in proving that the United States wanted a fair settlement in the Middle East. Kilgore continued to believe that the Bahraini Council would reverse the cancellation decision if the oil embargo ended. Of course, this reversal would not be made public.<sup>65</sup> Hanks, therefore, held to his initial assessment that withdrawal moves should not be made while hope still existed for a reversal. The growing importance of the Middle East made the risk of a hasty departure worth the possible benefit of a continued presence in this crucial region of the world.<sup>66</sup>

AOPEC continued its discussion regarding the future of the embargo well into the summer of 1974. This constant wavering left Hanks with quite a dilemma. The annual rent for the Jufair facility was due on 30 June, and he had to decide whether or not to pay. He decided to continue his policy of assuming that the MEF would be able to stay and paid the full amount to Bahrain on 30 June. In effect Hanks was telling the Bahrainis that the MEF intended to stay in Bahrain.<sup>67</sup> Finally, on 19 July, the Government of Bahrain told the new American Ambassador, Joseph Twinam, that the MEF could stay in Bahrain. As expected, the Foreign Minister emphasized the importance that no public announcement be made and that the reversal must be

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 280.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 285.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 287.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 296-7.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 309.

kept quiet.<sup>68</sup> Negotiations did have to proceed, however, to resolve a few remaining points of contention. The Bahrainis were primarily concerned with their ability to have jurisdiction over American servicemen in Bahrain. Both parties eventually decided, however, that this issue could be resolved without amending the stationing agreement.<sup>69</sup> Another issue was the amount of rent that the Americans were paying annually. In 1971, with the Bahrainis reeling from the British departure, the depletion of oil reserves, and the decrease in the pearling industry, the United States had been able to drive a hard bargain and convince the Bahrainis to make the United States pay only \$600,000 annually. This figure was low in 1971, but it had relatively become even lower by 1974. At first the Navy Department was stubborn to change and frustrated Hanks tremendously. Finally, after much heartache, Washington agreed in December to pay the \$4 million that the Bahrainis demanded to keep the MEF in Bahrain.<sup>70</sup>

As Hanks's time as CMEF wound to a close, one final situation would again show the American government's basic lack of understanding of Gulf politics. During MIDLINK-74, a naval exercise with India, Pakistan, Iran, and others, the aircraft carrier *USS Constitution* was dispatched to the Gulf without informing any Arab nations of the intent of the mission. In his diary Hanks remarked, "'*Connie* going to the Gulf. State has notified all CENTO posts. Arabs will be told *only* when *Connie*, *Berkeley*, and *Cochrane* enter the Gulf! Damage now triple compounded: Carrier to the Gulf on short fuse; surprise Arabs; gut MIDLINK. We are truly our own worst enemy.'"<sup>71</sup> In response the Bahrainis demanded a public statement that would promise that Bahrain would never be used as a staging ground for an attack on other Arab

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<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 312.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 313.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 314-8, 347.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 332.

states.<sup>72</sup> Yet again, policy from Washington had hampered the delicate political balance that determined the future of the MEF. Finally, after over two crucial and eventful years in the Middle East, Hanks received orders that his relief, Rear Admiral Thomas J. Bigley, would arrive in February 1975. After a brief turnover Hanks left Bahrain for Washington on 21 February with the future of the MEF still very much in doubt.<sup>73</sup> Although he left with the MEF's future still hanging in the balance, enough cannot be said for the job that Hanks did as CMEF. His greatest accomplishment was constantly keeping the hope alive that the MEF could stay in Bahrain. The situation became quite grim at times, but Hanks remained committed to keeping the MEF in Bahrain. He understood the nuances of dealing with the Bahraini leadership and used all of his knowledge to provide a great service to both the Navy and the United States by persuading the Bahrainis to not give up on the MEF.

Bigley assumed the duties of CMEF and was tasked with continuing the progress Hanks had made in reversing the cancellation decision. Upon his departure Hanks reluctantly had commented, however, "Odds remained extremely high that Washington would eventually find itself devastated by its present policies" in regards to the MEF's future in Bahrain.<sup>74</sup> Bigley, who had been reluctant to come to the Middle East, remained consistently pessimistic about the MEF's future throughout his time as CMEF.<sup>75</sup> He also was bothered by Twinam's seeming unwillingness to fully support the goal of keeping the MEF in Bahrain. In August 1975, just a few months after Bigley's arrival, the Emir disbanded the National Assembly because it had constantly challenged his authority. At about the same time, Bigley received notice that the

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<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 334.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 347, 350.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 365.

<sup>75</sup> Winkler, Chapter 5, 16.

MEF would have to leave by July 1977. This notice, however, caused little alarm in Washington since the leaders there were comfortable with the progress of the Twin Pillars strategy. Also, the oil embargo was becoming a distant memory, so why worry about losing a little influence in the Middle East?<sup>76</sup> Accordingly, Bigley began to work on a departure plan since he saw little hope of the Bahrainis changing their minds.<sup>77</sup> Eventually, however, when Bigley was making his departure call on the Emir in late June 1976, the Emir told him that the Navy would not have to leave the next summer. The Emir also admitted that the decision to invoke the eviction order once again was primarily based on internal political issues surrounding the dissolution of the National Assembly.<sup>78</sup> Although both his own pessimism and internal Bahraini political issues had hampered him, Bigley was able to keep the MEF in Bahrain on his watch. Unlike Hanks, however, Bigley, because of his desire to be elsewhere in the Navy, was not able to make progress in a period of relative calm that would have allowed him to do so.

Having received an extension on the lease agreement until 30 June 1977, the Navy promoted Bigley and ordered him to Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, as Deputy Commander in Chief, Pacific Command. On 30 June 1976 Rear Admiral William J. Crowe, Jr. relieved Bigley as the commander of the Middle East Force.<sup>79</sup> From a 1976 perspective Crowe's new position could not have seemed either career enhancing or attractive. The Persian Gulf was an incredibly misunderstood region of the world when Crowe and his wife Shirley departed for Manama. Crowe, however, had actually pursued the CMEF job. He believed that this job would allow him

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<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-9.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 19-20.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 20-1.

<sup>79</sup> ADM William J. Crowe, Jr., *In the Line of Fire: From Washington to the Gulf, the Politics and Battles of the New Military* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 164.

to weave his academic and practical background in politics into his everyday military duties.<sup>80</sup>

After graduating from the United States Naval Academy in 1947, Crowe, besides serving in the submarine force, would go on to graduate from George Washington University Law School, earn a master's degree in personnel administration from Stanford University, and complete the PhD program in political science at Princeton University. He also held several jobs in the Pentagon where he benefited on a daily basis from seeing the Navy participating in both inter-government and international politics.<sup>81</sup>

With these political and diplomatic tools in hand, Crowe arrived in Bahrain with orders to work with the American Ambassador to reverse the cancellation decision.<sup>82</sup> Although the task facing him was indeed daunting, perhaps no one in the Navy was more qualified to handle the job than Rear Admiral Bill Crowe. Like Bigley, Crowe also faced the challenge of working with Ambassador Joseph Twinam. Although he outwardly supported the diplomatic mission of renewing the lease agreement with Bahrain, Crowe believed that Twinam did not sincerely believe in the wisdom of this endeavor. Twinam felt that it was in America's best interests to decrease its permanent presence in the Persian Gulf.<sup>83</sup> Fortunately for Crowe and the renewal process, Wat Cluverius replaced Twinam as Ambassador to Bahrain shortly after Crowe's assumption of his duties as CMEF. Cluverius came from a Navy family and thus valued the benefits of a strong American naval presence in the Persian Gulf.<sup>84</sup> Since Cluverius and Crowe held concurrent opinions about the importance of Bahrain to American interests, the two men

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<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 43-4.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*



soon became close and were able to work together quite effectively.<sup>85</sup> This is not to say, however, that the process of reversing the Bahraini cancellation decision would be an easy one.

Since the extension of the agreement expired exactly one year from Crowe's change of command ceremony, time was of the utmost importance if Crowe and Cluverius were to have a chance at saving the agreement. The Bahrainis, however, faced no such time constraint. They could stall for as long as they wished since they could extend the agreement at any time. Crowe obviously did not have this luxury. The Bahrainis took full advantage of their position and proceeded with great caution in further negotiations with the Americans. Crowe recollected, "After the first six months we felt as if we had been batting our heads against a brick wall."<sup>86</sup> Although frustrating to Crowe and Cluverius, the Bahraini leadership had every reason to take their time in the negotiations because of the politically sensitive nature of the Navy's presence in Bahrain.

In 1976 the Arab world was still reeling from the October 1973 War in which the United States had so fully supported Israel. Although they did not agree with the policy, the Bahraini leaders understood that the United States supported Israel out of political necessity. Having this understanding did little to affect the everyday Bahraini's opinion about a strong American presence in the Middle East, however, since it would have been political suicide for the Bahraini leaders to publicly proclaim this understanding.<sup>87</sup> Additionally, the Bahraini leadership was worried about being perceived by Kuwait, Qatar, and other emirates as a puppet state of the United States.<sup>88</sup> The central dilemma for the Bahraini leaders came to be how to balance the

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<sup>85</sup> Interview with ADM William J. Crowe, Jr., 20 April 2000, U.S. Naval Academy

<sup>86</sup> Crowe, 165.

<sup>87</sup> Crowe interview.

<sup>88</sup> Crowe, 166.

need to please their domestic population, their desire to be viewed in favor amongst other Arab states, and the advantages of having an American presence at Jufair. The eventual solution to this dilemma became a public display to the Bahraini commoners and the Arab world of Bahrain's resolve to end the American presence and a private display to Crowe and Cluverius that a subtle American presence was indeed desirable.

As the months dragged on with little progress made to reverse the cancellation decision, Crowe learned that Deputy Secretary of Defense William Clements would be visiting Bahrain in October. To both Cluverius and him, this visit was a sign from Washington that they were not making adequate progress in convincing the Bahrainis to reverse their decision.<sup>89</sup> On 24 October Clements arrived and proceeded to throw a significant speed bump on the path to a favorable Bahraini decision. What Crowe and his predecessors had learned in their interactions with the Bahraini leaders was the importance of understanding and appreciating the Arab way of doing business. The Bahrainis, like all Arabs, valued friendly conversation and custom as an important part of any negotiation or discussion. They expected to spend time drinking bitter Arab coffee and exchanging pleasantries. Clements, in complete disregard to custom and the lessons that the Middle East Force commanders understood so well, bypassed all ritual and began his attempt to coerce the Bahrainis into understanding the value of an American presence. The Bahrainis, who were obviously disturbed by Clements's disrespect for their culture and his resemblance to the intrusive British Residents of their past, paid no attention to his arguments and instead attacked the American commitment to a mutually beneficial relationship. They pointed to the fact that the status quo had not changed since the original cancellation decision following the 1973 War. If the Americans could not make any adjustments in three years, how could they be expected to

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<sup>89</sup>Winkler, Chapter 5, 23.

change their posture at all? Clements clearly brought out the most anti-American feelings that the Bahraini leaders held. After just one day he left, having worsened the situation and having made Crowe's and Cluverius's jobs that much harder.<sup>90</sup>

Despite the persistence of the official Bahraini position that the Americans must honor the lease agreement by leaving upon the Bahrainis' request, Crowe and Cluverius were not entirely pessimistic about their chances of keeping the U.S. Navy in Bahrain. Many Shiite businessmen argued that the Arab press did not accurately reflect the true beliefs of either the Bahraini leadership or the people. These men, who were primarily of Iranian descent, had played a crucial role in helping Bahraini trade and commerce to prosper. As such, they held a great deal of influence on the island. The American policy toward Israel did not enrage the Shiites to a great extent since they were not Arabs. They explained to Crowe, "Your presence is a moderating force, a force for stability. We are businessmen. We want you here." Crowe and Cluverius also had begun to realize that many Arab Bahrainis wanted an American presence in Bahrain. They genuinely liked Americans as people, and they loved American products. Unfortunately, American policy toward Israel prevented these Arabs from wholeheartedly supporting the American presence. Crowe commented, "Their ambivalence was almost painful to watch."<sup>91</sup>

These encounters and observations, along with the Clements fiasco, began to enable Crowe to place the lease agreement for the Bahrainis in the larger political scene of the Middle East. The Bahrainis' arguments against Clements's positions made it clear that something visible and tangible had to be done for the Americans to remain in Bahrain. The Bahrainis would

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<sup>90</sup> Crowe, 165-7.

<sup>91</sup> Crowe, 165.

simply not accept a continuation of the status quo. If they did, it would send a signal to the Arab world that the Bahrainis had capitulated to all American requests and desires. This understanding allowed Crowe to begin to formulate a plan that he could present to the Bahraini leadership that would signal an American commitment to working within Bahraini political restraints. Central in this plan would be measures that the Bahraini Foreign Minister could present as evidence that Bahrain had "imposed severely revised terms on [an American presence]."<sup>92</sup>

Developing a plan that was acceptable to the Bahrainis was not the only challenge that Crowe faced. He also had to sell his plan to his superiors in the Navy. The first obstacle in his chain of command was Admiral David Bagley, the Commander-in-Chief of U.S. Naval Forces Europe. Crowe's most substantial proposal involved moving the dependents of the crew of the *Lasalle* back to the United States. Although the *Lasalle's* crew complement was about 1200, only 300 or 400 crewmembers had families that would have been living in Bahrain. Furthermore, all but about 150 families had left the base when Bahrain had announced its cancellation decision. Crowe also proposed to put the crew of the ship on a one-year rotation schedule. The obvious goal of this plan was to reduce the perceived American presence in Bahrain. The ship would still be there; so all military capabilities would be intact. There just would not be as many visible Americans in Bahrain on a daily basis.<sup>93</sup>

In order to get to Washington to sell the plan, Crowe first had to get Bagley's blessing. Since Bagley did not want Crowe to deal directly with Washington, Crowe called Rear Admiral Jim Stockdale, a member of the Navy staff at the Pentagon and an Annapolis classmate of Crowe's, and asked him to secure orders so that Crowe could come to Washington for

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<sup>92</sup> Crowe, 168.

<sup>93</sup> Crowe, 169.

consultations on the Bahrain situation. Stockdale was successful, and Crowe received a message a few days later ordering him to Bahrain. Cluverius also was able to get permission to go to Washington with Crowe. On his way back to the States, Crowe stopped in London to see the disgruntled Bagley. Upon hearing of Crowe's proposal regarding the *Lasalle*, Bagley argued, "That is terrible for a ship. We can't really do that." Crowe responded, "If we want to stay there we are going to have to do exactly that, or something very like it." Crowe then highlighted other drawdowns regarding the base facilities he planned to execute. He assured Bagley that "If we do these things I can go back to the Foreign Minister and make a proposal that might be acceptable." Finally, Bagley yielded and told Crowe that if he could make the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral James L. Holloway III, buy into the reduction plan then he would go along with it. Crowe easily sold the proposals to Holloway, and Cluverius and he returned to Bahrain with a solid plan to keep the United States Navy in Bahrain.<sup>94</sup>

Armed with Holloway's blessing, Crowe and Cluverius presented their new proposals to the Bahraini Foreign Minister. Upon hearing of Crowe's plan to move the *Lasalle*'s homeport from Bahrain to the United States, the Foreign Minister's attitude toward a favorable decision became noticeably more positive. His reaction confirmed what Crowe had suspected when he made his initial overture to Bagley: the most important aspect of the American-Bahraini relationship was perception. The Foreign Minister explained to the *New York Times*, "The main thing is that we don't want to have an American presence here in such a way that invites other presences here."<sup>95</sup> The Foreign Minister had never actually been to the base and even inquired,

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<sup>94</sup> Crowe, 168-9.

<sup>95</sup> *New York Times*, 15 May 1977, page 7, column 1.

"Is there an airstrip out there?"<sup>96</sup> Obviously, details did not matter. The Bahrainis were solely concerned with what they could present to their own people and to the larger Arab world. In fact, they were so concerned with perception that Cluverius was able to persuade the Bahrainis to lower the rent from \$4 million per year to \$2 million since such a measure could easily be interpreted as signifying a reduced American presence. Upon learning this incredulous news, the State Department's Middle East desk replied, "In the last forty years of American diplomacy no one has ever lowered the rent. This is unprecedented in the annals of the State Department."<sup>97</sup>

As the 30 June deadline approached, Crowe's frustrations increased as the leaders with whom he needed to negotiate were vacationing throughout Europe.<sup>98</sup> During May, however, the American media maintained a positive tone regarding the possible outcomes of the negotiations. On 1 May the *Washington Post* reported, "The outlook appears good for the U.S. to retain enough access to meet its essential needs while sparing these cooperative Arab countries from the political embarrassment of accepting American 'bases.'"<sup>99</sup> By 14 May the newspaper had revealed that an agreement had been reached that would allow the Navy to continue its mission with the help of Bahrain "without leaving Bahrain open to charges of harboring a United States military base." The article goes on to emphasize the important distinction that the Navy would have a facility, not a base, in Bahrain. It also reveals Crowe's belief that "'if we can still come in, I can do what I have to do.'"<sup>100</sup> The *New York Times* further substantiated this statement by concluding, "It appears that the Navy will be able to maintain its most important support

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<sup>96</sup> Crowe, 170.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 170-1.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>99</sup> *Washington Post*, 1 May 1977, page A12.

<sup>100</sup> *Washington Post*, 14 May 1977, page A12.

services."<sup>101</sup> Both the *Post* and the *Times* consistently emphasized the need to reduce the perceived American presence while maintaining an operational capability in the Persian Gulf. The American media had clearly come to grips with the crux of the negotiations with Bahrain.

This is not to say, however, that the Bahrainis agreed publicly with the Americans about anything. Throughout the negotiation process, they consistently told the Arab world that the Americans were on their way out for good. On 11 June the Foreign Minister announced that the stationing agreement with the United States would expire on 1 July. Although he did mention that Bahrain would still provide "nonmilitary" services, there was clearly no mention of a compromise with the Americans.<sup>102</sup>

Despite the announcement of the Foreign Minister, the two sides, by 15 June, had reached an agreement to keep the United States Navy in Bahrain. The principle points of the agreement were the reduction in the sight of visible sailors ashore, the departure of the *Lasalle*, and the reduction in rent. The Navy would, however, be able to keep all its buildings at Jufair since "these facilities kept sailors occupied and out of sight."<sup>103</sup> When the agreement was reached, the Foreign Minister held several press conferences that seemingly announced an American departure. On 29 June he officially announced that Bahrain had terminated its agreement with the United States. He added that U.S. ships would be able to call on ports in Bahrain just as they would to any other friendly port. In keeping with Bahrain's policy of pacifying the Arab world, the statement emphasized, "The facilities did not constitute a military base. There were no maneuvers and no dense presence on the part of those with whom the agreement was signed.

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<sup>101</sup> *New York Times*, 15 May 1977, page 7, column 1

<sup>102</sup> "Treaty with U.S. Not To Be Renewed," Baghdad INA in Arabic, 1218 GMT 11 June 1977, FBIS Daily Reports, 13 June 1977, pg. V.C-1.

<sup>103</sup> Winkler, Chapter 5, 27.

Bahrain was an outpost for the refueling of U.S. naval vessels exactly like any other outpost where planes or ships of any other country are provided with fuel."<sup>104</sup> Indeed, the whole world must have thought that the Navy was leaving Jufair. In fact, Crowe commented, "The two trains had managed to pass each other in the night on what looked like the same track."<sup>105</sup>

By realizing that the Foreign Minister had to be able to make it seem like the Americans were leaving, Crowe was able to keep the Navy in Bahrain. Upon reflecting on his career, Crowe believes that his keeping the Middle East Force in Bahrain was one of his greatest accomplishments. Without the MEF in Bahrain, escorting reflagged Kuwaiti tankers in 1987 and 1988 would have been impossible and naval operations during the Gulf War would have been incredibly difficult to execute. It is with these examples as evidence that Crowe claims, "Pound for pound, Bahrain has been the best ally we have had in recent times."<sup>106</sup> Taken from a man who would go on to become the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, this praise is indeed a shining proclamation of the importance of the American navy's presence in Bahrain.

In the years following Crowe's departure, Bahrain would continue to face accusations that it was "harboring" an American navy base. The intensity of these charges would grow as the Iranian revolution erupted in 1979. On 3 March 1979 the Bahraini Foreign Minister denied reports that Bahrain was secretly keeping U.S. equipment. He then asserted that the "Bahraini Government does not believe in military bases and blocs. 'We only believe in collective Arab defense.'"<sup>107</sup> This position remained constant in the coming years as Bahrain did everything that

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<sup>104</sup> "Termination of Naval Agreement with U.S. Announced," Doha QNA in Arabic, 29 June 1977, FBIS Daily Reports, 29 June 1977, pg. V.C-1.

<sup>105</sup> Crowe, 171.

<sup>106</sup> Crowe interview and Crowe, 171.

<sup>107</sup> "Foreign Minister Denies Existence of 'Secret' U.S. Equipment," Manama Gulf News Agency in Arabic, 1844 GMT 3 March 1979, FBIS Daily Reports, 6 March 1979, pg. V.C-1.



it could to cover up the presence of the MEF at Jufair. On 7 February 1980 the Government "categorically denied the presence of any foreign military bases in Bahrain and asserted that it will never provide any military bases or facilities for any foreign state, 'especially the big powers.'"<sup>108</sup> Clearly, the Bahrainis knew that the Arab world could not think that they hosted an American naval facility.

Crowe and Hanks had understood this complexity as well. In all of their negotiations with the Bahrainis to keep the MEF at Jufair, these venerable commanders knew that perception was the key to finding an acceptable solution. If it were not for their keen understanding of both Arabs and Arab politics, they probably would never have grasped the intricacies of the American presence in Bahrain. If they had acted as Clements had acted, the MEF would certainly have had no future in Bahrain. Crowe and Hanks used their minds before their mouths, however, and kept the Navy in one of its most strategically valuable positions. Today, the Navy's Fifth Fleet sails with ease in and out of Bahrain. Bahrain is a vital part of American security policy in the Persian Gulf. The tiny island would be a distant memory, however, if a few enlightened admirals had not shed their perceptions and dealt with the Bahrainis with an open mind and respectful intellect.

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<sup>108</sup> "Government Denies Presence of Foreign Bases on its Territory," Manama Gulf News Agency in Arabic, 0835 GMT 7 February 1980, FBIS Daily Reports, 7 February 1980, pg. V.C-1.

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